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CIVIL CONFLICT

MARTIN: A senior Navy officer acknowledged today that the loss of 2 attack planes in Sunday's air strike against Syrian positions in Lebanon took the Pentagon by surprise and has forced a reassessment of tactics for future bombing missions. The pilots of the American A-6 and A-7 jets were hampered in spotting their targets by a thick morning haze which forced them to fly lower and into the path of heavier-than-expected anti-aircraft fire. Today 2 American F-14 Tomcats flew a reconnaissance mission over Lebanon, the first such mission since Sunday's air strike. Pentagon officials say the planes were not fired upon, so for at least one day the Pentagon has made good on its claim that Sunday's strike succeeded in preventing any more attacks on American aircraft. Missions like today's are becoming increasingly important to the safety of Americans in Lebanon since the U.S. has lost one of its prime sources of intelligence on the Middle East: the Palestine Liberation Organization headed by Yasser Arafat. Knowledgeable sources say U.S. intelligence was hurt badly by the PLO exodus from Beirut after Israel invaded Lebanon. According to these sources, the intelligence agency which suffered the most was not the CIA but the NSA, the National Security Agency, which had been monitoring PLO communications in and around Beirut, listening as they talked about their plans for political, military and terrorist action. When the PLO left Beirut, they took their communications with them and sources say the NSA has never again been able to plug into their communications circuits. It is impossible to prove whether the bombings of the American Embassy and Marine headquarters in Beirut could've been headed off if the NSA were still listening to PLO communications. But it is clear that at a time when the threat to Americans in Lebanon is rising, the ability of American intelligence to detect those threats is falling. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.